



M E D I A R E L E A S E

STATE OF TENNESSEE
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

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FEDS REWARD TENNESSEE FOR ADOPTION GAINS *Second-Best Performance in the Nation Nets DCS \$1.5 Million*

NASHVILLE – The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has awarded the Tennessee Department of Children's Services \$1.528 million in adoption incentives because of dramatic improvement in the number of the state's foster children who have been adopted.

Tennessee's success during the 2005 fiscal year marked the second highest adoption improvement rate in the nation, according to HHS.

"We're thrilled," said DCS Commissioner Dr. Viola P. Miller, "because this means the lives of our children and families are truly improving in Tennessee. It represents the hard work of our staff, their community partners and especially the families who have opened their homes and their hearts to these deserving young people."

In FY04-05, Tennessee finalized 1143 adoptions, up from 891 in FY02-03. The federal government compared Tennessee's gains to its previous best-ever year: FY02-03, when it saw 954 finalized adoptions.

Based on this, HHS awarded the \$1.5 million in incentives, which will be used to enhance Tennessee's child-welfare program.

The incentives mark more than increasing the adoption rate. They also reflect Tennessee's improving results in placing children aged 9 and older and in bettering the placement rate for special-needs children.

"You just have to do what's best for the kids," said Bradley County's Jerry Hicks. "They need TLC – tender, loving care."

He and his wife, Danna, are foster parents who have adopted three teenagers already.

“When these children are adopted, they have a home,” said Danna. “A roof over their heads. Their own blanket. Their own pillow. Their own comforter. They have a family. We just hope that that more people open their eyes to the kids of Tennessee.”

Tennessee has been working especially hard to reduce the amount of time that children spend in its foster-care system and to reduce the number of children in its custody. When Dr. Miller became the DCS commissioner in late 2003, the department had approximately 10,600 children in state custody. Today that number is just over 9,000.

